

Message Text

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ACTION INR-07

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 INRE-00 CIAE-00 NSAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2118

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4212

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINR IN
SUBJECT: BIO DATA ON JAGFIVAN RAM

REF: STATE 064408

1. JAGJIVAN RAM , 68, IS THE SENIORMOST MP IN PARLIAMENT AND THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS "HARIJAN" (UNTOUCHABLE) IN INDIA. HE IS NOW CHAIRMAN OF THE CONGRESS FOR DEMOCRACY, THE THIRD LARGEST PARLIAMENTARY GROUP. HE SUPPORTS THE JANATA GOVERNMENT, BUT IS NOT PARTICIPATING IN IT.

2. ABILITY: ALTHOUGH EARLIER IN HIS CAREER, JAGJIVAN RAM WAS RATED BY SOME OBSERVERS AS AN INDIFFERENT ADMINISTRATOR AND CABINET MINISTER, OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, AT LEAST, THE ASSESSMENT BY INDIAN CIVIL SERVANTS AND OTHER OBSERVERS HAS BEEN THAT RAM HAS BEEN AN OUTSTANDING MINISTER, HE IS CREDITED WITH MAKING DECISIONS QUICKLY, WITH BEING THOROUGHLY FAMILIAR WITH THE DETAILS OF HIS MINISTRIES AND WITH TREATING SUBORDINATES POLITELY AND RESPECTFULLY. RAM WAS HIGHLY RESPECTED AT THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE AS AN EXTERMELY CAPABLE ADMINISTRATOR. THE SERVICE CHIEFS LIKED HIM BECAUSE HE LESTENED TO THEM AND, WITHIN REASON, TRIED TO FULFILL THEIR NEEDS. CONSIDERING HIMSELF A POLITICIAN, RAM DEFERRED TO THEIR EXPERTISE AND HAD A PRAGMATIC APPROACH TO
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MAKING INDIA STRONG MILITARILY AND ABLE TO DEFEND ITSELF. IN ADDITION TO HOLDING HIM IN HIGH REGARD AS AN ADMINISTRATOR, SOME AGRICULTURAL MINISTRY PERSONNEL LOOKED UPON RAM AS A "LUCKY" PRESENCE FOR THE MINISTRY. BOTH OF RAM'S STINTS AT THE MINISTRY COINCIDED WITH IMPROVED WEATHER CONDITIONS AND INCREASED FOOD PRODUCTION. IN RECENT YEARS THERE HAVE BEEN NO RUMORS THAT RAM HAS TAKEN

ADVANTAGE OF HIS MINISTERIAL POSITIONS FOR PECUNIARY GAIN;
SUCH ACCUSATIONS WERE PREVALENT SEVERAL DECADES AGO.

3. AMONG HIS CONGRESS PEERS, RAM HAS THE REPUTATION
AS AN EXCELLENT POLITICIAN, ABLE TO COMPROMISE AND
TO WORK TOGETHER IN A COLLEGIAL ATMOSPHERE. HE IS ALSO,
A WILY POLITICIAN CAPABLE OF SHIFTING HIS
SUPPORT IN HIS OWN INTEREST, AS HE DID ON TWO OCCASIONS
TO HELP THWART THE AMBITIONS OF MORARJI DESAI: IN
1964 WHEN DESAI SOUGHT TO BECOME THE SUCCESSOR TO NEHRU
AS PRIME MINISTER, AND IN THE PRESIDENTIAL NOMINATION
DISPUTE IN 1969 WHICH LED TO THE BREAK UP OF THE CONGRESS.
MRS. GANDHI HAS ALWAYS CONSIDERED RAM A POTENTIAL RIVAL.
DURING THIS ELECTION CAMPAIGN, OBSERVERS SPECULATED THAT
IS THE RESULTS WERE CLOSE,
RAM COULD EASILY SWING HIS BLOC TO WHICHEVER SIDE WOULD
ENSURE FOR HIM GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP.

4. IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT HE HAD HOPED, HAD THE JANATA
PARTY RECEIVED 10-20 FEWER SEATS IN PARLIAMENT, TO BE
A SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER AS THE KEY
FIGURE IN THE SWING INTERMEDIATE PARLIAMENTARY BLOC.
HIS CHALLENGE TO MORARJI DESAI HAVING BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL
AT HIS POINT, RAM HAS CHOSEN TO SIT OUTSIDE THE GOVERN-
MENT, SUPPORTING AND IMPLICITLY PREPARED TO CRITICIZE
THE GOVERNMENT AS THE SITUATION SEEMS TO DEMAND. RAM
MAY CONSIDER THAT THE CHANCES ARE REASONABLY GOOD THAT
RIVALRIES WITHIN THE JANATA PARTY MAY CAUSE PARLIAMENTARY
DEFLECTIONS IN THE COMING MONTHS OR YEAR WHICH COULD
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LEAD TO A NEW OPPORTUNITY FOR RAM TO PUT HIMSELF FORWARD
AS AN ALTERNATIVE PM CANDIDATE. LIKE MANY INDIANS,
RAM IS REPORTED TO BE STRONG BELIEVER IN ASTROLOGY AND
TO HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT HIS STARS FORETELL THAT HE WILL
YET BE PM OF INDIA.

5. VIEWS: RAM IS NOTED PRINCIPALLY FOR HIS STRONG
DEFENSE OF THE RIGHTS OF HIS HARIJAN COMMUNITY AND FOR
THE ABOLITION OF CASTEISM. BEYOND THAT, BECAUSE OF
HIS 30-YEAR ALMOST UNINTERRUPTED CAREER AS A MINISTER,

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 NEW DELHI 4212

IT IS DIFFICULT TO DISTINGUISH HIS PERSONAL VIEWS FROM THE OFFICIAL POSITIONS WHICH HE HAS FAITHFULLY ESPOUSED. IT WOULD APPEAR, HOWEVER, THAT RAM IS ESSENTIALLY A PRAGMATIST WHOSE COMMITMENT TO SOCIALISM IS PRACTICAL RATHER THAN IDEOLOGICAL. THOUGH BASICALLY CONSERVATIVE AND CENTRIST, HE SUCCESSFULLY PROJECTS A LEFTIST AND PROGRESSIVE IMAGE WHICH HAS CONTRIBUTED TO HIS POPULARITY. DURING HIS RECENT TENURES AT THE DEFENSE AND AGRICULTURAL MINISTRIES, HE WAS NOT NOTED FOR TAKING STRONG POSITIONS ON ISSUES AND SEEMED TO RELY UPON THE EXPERTISE WITHIN THE BUREAUCRACIES. IN HIS SUPPORT FOR MRS. GANDHI, HE DEFENDED THE EMERGENCY VIGOROUSLY, PARTICULARLY WHEN IT WAS FIRST DECLARED, AND WAS AN EARLY EXPONENT OF THE NEED FOR WHAT EVENTUALLY BECAME THE CONTROVERSIAL 42ND CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT. REGARDING THE UNITED STATES, RAM AS DEFENSE MINISTER WAS PREDICTABLY CRITICAL OF THE PERCEIVED POSITION OF THE US DURING THE INDO-PAKISTAN WAR AND OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF DIEGO GARCIA. BY AND LARGE, HOWEVER, IN HIS COMMENTS ON THE FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC CRITICS OF MRS. GANDHI'S RULE, RAM WAS NOT GIVEN TO EXTREMIST RHETORIC. RAM'S STYLE IS LOW KEY AND HE PREFERS TO MAKE HIS POINT THROUGH HUMOR RATHER THAN BOMBASTE.

6. HEALTH: RAM HAS HAD SEVERAL ILLNESSES IN RECENT YEARS, VARIOUSLY ATTRIBUTED TO HEART CONGESTION OR
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RESPIRATORY AILMENTS. IN 1976 HE HAD AN OPERATION TO REMOVE CATARACTS IN ONE EYE. HIS MAIN PROBLEM, HOWEVER, APPEARS TO BE OBESITY, CAUSED IN PART BY INABILITY TO MOVE EASILY AFTER A POORLY HEALED HIP INJURY MANY YEARS AGO.

7. FAMILY: RAM IS MARRIED AND HAS TWO CHILDREN, A SON

AND A DAUGHTER. MRS. RAM, THE FORMER INDRANI DEVI, HAS BEEN DESCRIBED AS AN OLD-FASHIONED LADY OF LIMITED EDUCATION WHO DOES NOT PARTICIPATE IN POLITICS. RAM'S SON, SURESH KUMAR, HAS BEEN ASSOCIATED WITH HIS FATHER IN THE CURRENT CAMPAIGN. SURESH KUMAR WAS THE CENTER OF A CONTROVERSY IN 1974 WHEN CONGRESS PARTY LEADERS IN BIHAR SOUGHT TO INCLUDE KUMAR IN THE STATE CABINET WITHOUT CONSULTING EITHER RAM OR HIS SON.

8. CURRICULUM VITAE: BORN APRIL 5, 1908 IN THE PROVINCE OF BIHAR TO A MODERATELY WELL-TO-DO HARIJAN FAMILY OF THE LEATHER-WORKING (CHAMAR) CASTE, RAM WAS EDUCATED AT BANARAS HINDU UNIVERSITY AND EARNED A B.S. DEGREE FROM CALCUTTA UNIVERSITY IN 1930. HE WAS ELECTED TO THE BIHAR LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN 1937 AND SOON OBTAINED A LEADERSHIP POSITION. DURING WWII, HE PARTICIPATED IN THE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT AND WAS TWICE IMPRISONED FOR ANTI-BRITISH ACTIVITIES. HE JOINED NEHRU'S INTERIM CABINET IN 1946 AND THEREAFTER HELD A CABINET PORTFOLIO IN EVERY GOVERNMENT EXCEPT FOR THE PERIOD 1963-66 WHEN HE WAS ENGAGED IN PARTY WORK. HE WAS MINISTER FOR LABOR, 1946-52; FOR COMMUNICATIONS, 1951-56; FOR TRANSPORT AND RAILWAYS, 1957-62; FOR TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS, 1962-63; FOR LABOR EMPLOYMENT AND REHABILITATION, 1966-67; FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION, 1967-70; FOR DEFENCE, 1970-74; AND MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND IRRIGATION, 1974-77. ON FEBRUARY 2, 1977, HE RESIGNED FROM THE CABINET TO FORM THE CONGRESS

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FOR DEMOCRACY AND OPPOSE MRS. GANDHI IN THE ELECTION.
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Message Attributes

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